

VZCZCXRO6341
RR RUEHDE
DE RUEHYN #1996 1931032
ZNY EEEEE ZZH
R 121032Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY SANAA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4613
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS E F T O SANAA 001996

SIPDIS

NOFORN
SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/11/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [MEPI](#) [YE](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTIONS: CHARGE PRESSES FREEDOM AGENDA WITH
PRESIDENT SALEH

¶1. (SBU/NF) SUMMARY: In an unexpected meeting called by Saleh to discuss other issues (septel) on July 11, Charge pressed Saleh on respecting the June agreement of principles signed by the ruling party and the opposition. Charge particularly emphasized that equal access to government-owned media was not being implemented. Saleh defended himself by saying it was natural for the media to cover him more because of his official duties as Chief of State. He further noted that the fact that 64 Yemenis had applied to the Parliament to be presidential candidates was a clear sign of the ROYG's commitment to democracy. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU/NF) At the end of a discussion that covered a wide range of topics, Charge took the opportunity to tell Saleh that implementation of the agreement reached between the ruling party and the main opposition coalition in June is important. He pointed out that one of the principles agreed to -- equal access to government owned media, particularly broadcast outlets -- is not being respected. Yemeni TV, which has a monopoly on non-satellite broadcasts in Yemen, airs long presidential speeches, Charge said, but accords only a few moments to opposition candidates.

¶3. (SBU/NF) Saleh disagreed, saying that it was only natural for the media to cover him more, because he is the President, and carries out official duties, including the recent visit he made to countries around the region. Charge replied that this was not a valid argument, since this is an election season, and every speech the President gives, no matter the occasion, has political content. The main opposition candidates should be given the same opportunity to make their points.

¶4. (SBU/NF) The President then asked one of his advisors to bring in a current copy of the government daily "Al-Thawra," which he opened to a page showing photographs of all 64 Yemenis who had submitted applications to Parliament to run for the presidency. Displaying it to the Charge, he said, "This is democracy -- there are even several women running. In the United States, you only have two candidates, and we have 64!"

¶5. (SBU/NF) COMMENT: The tone of the meeting was light-hearted, but President Saleh received the Charge's message, which we have repeated at all levels of the ROYG and in a recent media statement, that the international community will be watching to see if the ROYG respects the agreement reached between the two main parties in order to give fair and transparent elections a chance.

¶6. (SBU/NF) COMMENT CONTINUED: Government media outlets certainly have progress to make in this regard. "Al-Thawra's" June 25 edition dedicated virtually all of its 26 pages to Saleh's nomination "by acclimation," and even added a 24-page insert filled with full-page ads from various organizations thanking Saleh for accepting the nomination.

Yemeni TV and radio followed roughly the same script. The main opposition candidate, by contrast, received only a four-by-six inch, below-the-fold mention in "Al-Thawra" and virtually no TV coverage. Post will continue to press this point and others related to the elections, particularly after Parliament gives its final approval to the list of candidates -- which we expect to number no more than three or four.

Khoury